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CARMA.

A Story From Real Life on the Frontier
(Written for THE ENTERPRISE.)

Under the cloudless infinity of a new Mexican sky and flanked by a bare ribbed range of hills called La Sierra Benado, is a wide drab tinted plain named La Plata. Drab is the normal tint of this wide reaching valley, but at times when the cloud-mass rolls up from the south and weep over its arid loneliness, it turns a vivid green in gratitude thereof.

In a wide, shallow arroyo, whose source is in the flanking hills and which eventually loses its identity in the scarcely perceptible hollow of the plain, there nestles beneath the embracing limbs of cottonwood trees the little village of Alamo Seco.

The excuse for its existence is to be found in the veins of precious metal that seam the rugged slopes of La Sierra Benado.

Here a community had gathered alternately engaged in mining and in agriculture. A way up at the foot of the hills in a wild gorge was a swirling, tumbling mountain stream, hurrying on to bury itself in the silt of the valley and hide itself from the relentless glare of the scorching sun. But its hurry was in vain, for at the mouth of the gorge an impediment in the shape of a dam had been placed, and from that point it was compelled to glide with a reluctant slowness along the windings of a muddy ditch, and at length spread itself faint and languidly over the fields and orchards of the land owners of Alamo Seco.

But American capital had gained a foothold in La Sierra Benado, with its accompanying rush and bustle, and the natives had thrown up their hands in astonishment at the astonishing ingenuity and enterprise of the new comers, and the fires of their little adobe smelters had died out from very shame of their own insignificance.

Sitting on a granite block on the slope of the mountains, your eye could take in at a single sweep the whole extent of the valley, and at times you could see crawling over it, apparently very slowly, a long, dark monster, and should you choose to change your romantic for a practical mood, you will arrive at the conclusion that it is simply a train of cars moving over the to you invisible track.

Alamo Seco not lying in the line of their survey, the railroad owners had simply ignored it and gone right along though they had erected a depot at a point nearest it, to handle freight and passengers, should there be any, and around the depot, springing on the necessity of a railway.

number of passengers have alighted, but we will concern our attention with one of the group in particular. He is a young man, probably twenty-three years of age, with hair very dark yet with a suggestion of chestnut in it. His complexion is clear and his eyes brown, with a reddish glint in them that reminds one of the red inner light to be seen in the brown streak of a piece of polished obsidian. A dark mustache shades a good humored mouth, and the observer must come to the conclusion that he is both healthy and handsome.

He looks around, with valise in hand, as though expecting some one, and immediately his eye falls on a figure beckoning to him from the seat of a light buckboard. A pleased smile of recognition flits over the young man's face, and stepping over to the buckboard he greets the occupant warmly, seats himself beside him, and they start off in the direction of the hills. "Well, how did you enjoy your trip down?" asked the elder of the two men, who was dark, stout, and forty, and had an air of self-satisfied cynicism about him.

"Oh, pretty well," answered the younger.

"Make a wash on anything?"

"Can't say that I did."

"Well, went on the questioner bending over and producing a flask from a receptacle beneath the seat, "let's take a nip; and after that you can nibble a lunch or smoke a good cigar, just as your fancy takes. You know I have a soft job up here—and by the way, there's the loveliest little senorita on the road here before we get up to camp you ever laid your eyes on. I tried to make love to her, but it was no go; guess I'm too old. But you'll be all right if you work the racket artistically," and here he gave the young man a dig in the ribs, and with one eye closed smiled on him in a knowing way.

Two hours of rapid driving as the nature of the ascent would allow, brought them to the mouth of a canyon at the foot of the mountains and, embowered in a grove of agave and ash trees, was a low adobe house surrounded by a neat fence.

"Here's where the angel dwells," remarked the elder: "the old man peddles milk and fruit and truck up at camp. We'll let the horses drink water and take a rest, and we'll rest and drink milk." They were welcomed in broken English by a thin, dark man, who had a thin, aquiline nose, black beard, and big, dark, expressive, luminous eyes.

half closed and scintillating with a mischievous sparkle of mirth the next, and always, always beautiful.

"Well, what do you think of her?" They were toiling slowly up the narrow, winding grade of the mountain road, when the foregoing question was asked. The sun was sinking behind them, and scattering shafts of ruddy light were playing on the higher crags, and the young man appeared to be contemplating them with deep interest. The question was repeated, accompanied with a dig in the ribs, and the answer came, borne on the breath of a deep sigh.

"She's darling."

"Well, let's drink to the success of your wooing," and the flask was again resorted to.

A month or two had gone by. Morgan—that was the young man's name—had paid many visits upon every available pretext, to the ranch at the foot of the canyon, and he could speak Spanish fluently, having studied it thoroughly under the impression that it would be useful to him in countries where his vocation of assayer might take him. He had looked into Carma's eyes and her eyes had answered him in a way that made him feel that his breath had never yet been entirely alone together. The woman whom Carma spoke of as "Tia Juana" had seen to that, and the black eyes that gleamed out from a face pitted by small-pox, were ever on the alert when Morgan came down from the camp.

But one summer's evening Carma greeted him, and a searching glance around failed to discover the ever disagreeable Juana. He asked where she was. "She had gone to Alamo Seco with father. Old Pedro was left here, but she had gone out on foot in search of them."

Morgan flushed slightly, and his breast heaved as though with labored breathing as he again looked slowly around, and when his eyes met those of Carma he detected something in his glance that caused her to drop her lids and with a deep blush turn towards the house.

He followed her, and they sat for some time in silence, she apparently watching the sunset, with a somewhat feverish glow on her cheeks, and he regarding her with devouring, ardent gaze.

"Carma, don't you think that some of the peaches ought to be ripe?" "I don't know," she answered throwing him a half-frightened glance.

"Well, let us go and see."

They were still in search of ripe fruit when dusk was gathering, and it seemed as though the quest would have to be abandoned for lack of light.

"Oh, I remember a tree now that all says bears ripe fruit before the rest. Come!"

They found it, but the fruit was a little too high to reach.

"What shall we do?" asked Morgan.

"Why, we'll have to find the ladder."

"Oh, that will be too much trouble. Let me lift you up, Carma, and you can pull the branch down."

She demurred faintly.

"Oh, don't be foolish, Carma," he said, but his voice was dangerously low and entreating. "Raise your pretty little hands ready to grasp the branch and let me lift you."

She obeyed, displaying the bewitching contour of her perfect bust, but when he essayed to lift her she gave a hysterical laugh, dropped her arms, and then for one moment their eyes met in a burning glance, and the next Morgan was crouching madly and she lay limp and panting in his embrace. And he kissed her until she was nearly faint from ecstasy and poured into her ear the tale of his long, pent-up adoration, and she, passionate and emotional to an intense degree, and loving him as she did, abandoned herself to the delicious bliss of the hour, simply because nature had made her with emotions too powerful to be restrained by calm reason.

"Yes," she answered, looking up at him with a soft expectancy in the sweet eyes that had often looked sad and wistful of late.

He turned his look from her and seemed to be at a loss what to say further.

"Well," he said at length with an uneasy laugh, "Why don't you congratulate me?"

"You know I am glad," regarding him still with an expectant look, as though there was something he ought to say and yet refrained. And Morgan knew what she was expecting and hoping he would say, and knew it was a duty as a true man to say it; but, no, he had another proposal to make, which to his vitiated mind appeared reasonable if nothing else.

"Let us walk," he said, "I want to talk to you where Juana will not hear us."

They walked on in silence for a lit the ways, he pulling and gnawing at a cigar.

"Carma," he said at last, "I have lots of money now, and I must go back to my folks. But they would never speak to me if I was married to a Mexican girl. And yet I can't give you up—I'm too much in love with you for that."

She drew back from him with a low, soft cry, and seemed able to steady herself, clinging to the white trunk of a young sycamore, her big dark eyes full of mute pain, her full lips pale and quivering.

"Oh, God! You cannot mean it! You promised again and again with your lips close to mine that you could not live without me, and now you want to wedded wife. And I have been pure and true in my love for you, and now—now—Oh, you cannot mean it!"

"Oh, stuff. Don't act so wild." She seemed not to hear him. Presently she approached him and said in a husky voice:

"Edward—his given name was Edward—I have something to tell you, and here he voice became almost a whisper with a touch of awe in it. "I shall be a mother before many months, and you—you will be the father."

This announcement did not appear to trouble him. "You will not leave me now, will you Edward?" she pleaded with pathos in every word.

"Of course not, but this is unexpected news."

"But you will not desert me!"

"Why, of course not. I'll be back again in a few days."

All she could do was to watch him wearily as he rode away at a gallop.

It was late in the afternoon of a day in March, and a wrack of ragged clouds was sweeping over the sky and hiding from view at times the higher peaks of La Sierra Benado. The wind came sweeping across the plain and was tearing away the last vestige of winter leaves that still clung to the sycamore trees around the ranch at the mouth of the canyon.

The place looked forlorn and desolate, and was lacking in that prim neatness that had characterized it of yore. The mills and smelters at the mines up on the mountains were gloomy and silent too, for the mines had shut down for some reason, and bustle and life had all departed.

There seemed to be no one around the ranch except old Pedro. He was gazing in the waiting light at a horseman who was approaching on the road that came up the slope from the valley. He gazed intently for some time, and then suddenly clasped his hands together and exclaimed: "Balgame Dio! It is Francisco. I will hide. Let Juana tell him," and old Pedro moved stealthily toward the thick brush that grew further up the canyon.

The horseman rode slowly up to the house, looking around searchingly and seeming to be conscious of the unwelcome quiet and dreariness.

abandoned post, and on this particular day a young cattleman has reigned up his horse near the shattered walls, and appears to be listening intently for some particular sound.

Faintly borne to his ear on the light breeze came the lowing of aggressive bulls, the plaintive bleat of calves, and the solicitous lowing of matriarchal cows, mingled in a booming chorus, coming from a distance, sounds something like the humming drone of countless insects. "They are bunched on the flat yonder," he muttered to himself, and then he rode across the timbered depths of the Arivaipa creek, and emerged on the low level that beyond the canyon.

The surging cattle and the charging vaqueros were stirring up the white alkali dust in dense clouds; the rush and surge, the sharp yells of the vaqueros as they darted to and fro in the blinding white dust, and the roaring of the cattle made up a scene at once wild and exciting.

The young cattleman rode toward the noise and turmoil; a huge steer broke out from the herd and came tearing towards him; he on his part dashed towards the steer to turn him back to the herd, the steer however, and then it rolled into the dense brush on one side and in the blinding dust a vaquero who was in hot pursuit of the fugitive ran plump against him. But there was no time for words and in a flash they were both in pursuit; the vaquero named Francisco, swishes through the air, his horse braces himself on his heels, and the steer is brought round, maddened and bellowing, and the steer is dragged back to the herd.

Then the vaquero wipes the alkali from his smarting eyes and looks at his companion of the chase and starts as he does so. At the same moment two or three more vaqueros dash up, and the steer is dragged back to the herd.

And the cattle owners who are grouped around the herd greet the new comer heartily and call him Morgan.

By the first faint sign of dawn on the following morning, the horses were being caught by an expert roper preparatory to the day's round up. "What horse will you ride Francisco?" called out the roper.

"My own, to-day."

"If I had a horse of my own as good as that I wouldn't do other people's work on him."

"They were soon riding out toward the hills in scattering groups. The vaquero named Francisco, had told Morgan that he had seen cattle bearing his brand up at an almost inaccessible spring and that he had better go there himself if he wanted them brought out, as others might not be sure of the trail."

"The ground being so rough, and had volunteered to accompany him, as he knew the ground well."

As they rode along Morgan would often glance curiously at Francisco. There was a something in the vaquero's big dark eyes that sent his memory back to a ranch at the foot of La Sierra Benado in New Mexico.

"Were you ever in New Mexico, Francisco?"

"No, Senor, I was bred in Chihuahua. They had ridden over much rough ground and were descending from a rocky ridge into a little basin, scooped in the slope of the hills, when Francisco remarked: "It was here I saw your cattle; further down in a deep canyon there is water, I think the cattle are below."

They rode on, Francisco in the lead, and anon the basin narrowed and they found themselves on a dangerous trail following along the very brink of a deep narrow chasm. They were approaching a sharp curve; Francisco took down his coiled riata from his saddle, and forming a loop began to rehearse various twists and swings with it—a habit common enough with vaqueros. Slowly he swings the riata as they neared the sharp curve; then his wrist gives a quick turn, the loop drops around Morgan's body, a rake of the spurs sends Francisco's horse around the curve, and Morgan is dangling over the depths of the chasm at the end of the riata. Francisco is the riata fast to the horn of the saddle, and dismounting speaks a word to the horse and the horse braces against the strain. Then he goes to the edge of the chasm and dropping on his hands and knees peers over, and with a cruel exultant light in his eyes, calls out to the one dangling below:

"Como estamos, amigo?"

Morgan looks up with starting eyes, his hands clinging convulsively to the slippery raw hide. He is quivering with rage and terror, but believing the being above to be a mania, he must use diplomacy to extricate himself from his awful predicament.

"It was well done, Francisco," he cried, trying to look pleasant, "but you must pull me up now."

"How?" This was a puzzle to Morgan. He looked down, and some forty feet below him was the slender outreaching branch of a cottonwood tree that grew in the bottom of the chasm.

"How long is your rope Francisco?"

"Sixty feet."

"Good. Lower me down then, slowly, and I will give you the pick of my horses when we get back," Francisco laughs loudly at this and the sides of the chasm echo his laughter. Morgan looks up at the face with intent and warbling eagerness, and then below, far below, at the sharp upruling points of rock that are waiting to receive him, and sickens with deadly fear.

"Oyez, amigo!" calls Francisco. Morgan looks up.

"Did you ever live in New Mexico?"

Morgan does not answer.

"Answer!" spoke Francisco sharply, holding the edge of a sharp gleaming knife close to the taut riata.

"Yes!" gasped Morgan.

"And the ranch at the mouth of Canyon de Plata, at the foot of La Sierra Benado—do you you remember that?"

"Yes" came the answer, hoarsely.

Francisco leaned further over at the edge of the chasm and his eyes glittered with a fierce light.

"Once I had a sister there," he said, his voice quivering, "and a father. My sister was as beautiful as the angels, and as good, and my father adored her as I did. But the ranch is lonesome now. Carma is gone—do you hear! dog—murderer! There are three white crosses there now—yes, four; tia Juana lies there too—and you murdered them all!—You!—Oh, that I had words strong enough to curse you with! Look below you. You will strike on those rocks, and then your body will roll into the thick brush below, and none but the coyotes will ever find it. This is my vengeance—Look, see me cut my good riata—I will do it slowly that you may prepare your spirit for hell where it belongs." And as the knife slowly moved the taut riata, a quivering cry broke from the agonized wretch below. The knife touches the straining strands and with a snap they break asunder. On the sharp, jagged rocks below the body is caught and poised for a moment, and then it rolls into the dense brush in the bottom; up from the brush flutter two owls and setting on the limb of an adjacent tree they look with wide eyed solemnity from the quivering brush to the man on the brink above.

Francisco deliberately coils up the remainder of his severed riata, pats his horse's neck, mounts him, and rides away, not toward the San Pedro but over the bordering mountains.

A Brilliant Conception.

Mr. Hugh Ebbotte—Ain't yo' agoin' to Mrs. Yallerby's ball ober on Sebahnt aboon to-night, Gustus?

Mr. Augustus Whitewash—"Fraid I kalst, Hugh. It am a full dress affair, an' I hab no gloves."

Mr. Hugh Ebbotte—Sho, chile! Jas dip yo' hands in de mud, an' wash dem ober, an' you'll hab a skin tight pair ob white kids in no time.—Judge.

A New Idea.

Girl! Oh, no! This is our friend Cholly. He says those long coats dangling on broad trousers impede one's movements, so he has ordered his tailor to insert some wire rods behind to free one's garments from the other.

THIS IS CHOLLY CROSSING A STREET.—Life.

Hadn't Seen His Brother.

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STORY HORSE. CAME ABOUT THE 10th OF MAY TO ROUND Valley ranch, a dark brown horse, two white hind feet, star on forehead and branded on knee of hind leg. Party owning above animal can get the same by paying charges. JAMES BRASH.